

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 11, 2015

Agenda Item: Guidelines for Elk Shoulder Seasons

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed for Presentation: 1 hour

Background

In summer 2014, FWP Director Jeff Hagener authorized an internal process to explore and develop guidelines for the 2016 – 2017 biennial elk season setting process. This was in response to Gov. Bullock's charge to improve landowner relations and specifically in response to criticism that FWP was not meeting elk objectives. Fifteen to 20 FWP staff members (representing the Enforcement Division, Wildlife Division, and regional supervisors) met for three days, five different times from fall 2014 through spring 2015. The structured discussion was facilitated by the University of Montana. Given past ineffectiveness with late seasons, and the current over-objective status in many areas, Director Hagener charged the work group to develop a "next" iteration of more effective elk harvest management. The internal work group reviewed management history, research, and circumstances across Montana to develop these proposed guidelines.

The guidelines include:

1. Fundamental objectives to help guide and assess elk-season effectiveness.
2. Shoulder seasons as an option before and after the existing general firearm season.
3. Performance criteria to assess whether or not shoulder seasons should be maintained.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The guidelines and fundamental objectives and performance criteria will be presented to the Fish & Wildlife Commission on June 11. Public comment would be taken until 5 p.m., Monday July 13. Final adoption would take place in August.

Alternatives and Analysis

The guidelines may be approved as proposed or with adjustment based upon additional staff input, public comment, and/or Commission direction. If approved, the guidelines would assist staff preparations and address public expectations of process for biennial season setting. If the guidelines are not approved they would not be subject to public review or for use during biennial season setting.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

This proposal is aligned with known biology, management history, and experience. In order to expose the proposal to broad public review and input, FWP recommends adoption.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve for public comment the proposed Guidelines for Elk Shoulder Seasons as presented by FWP.